5: Beals & Carrasco E-5 (1940-1941) 1944
NU34 Tarasco NU34
Sierra Tarascans

000

American Anthropologist

NEW SERIES

ORGAN OF THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, THE AMERICAN ETHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY AND THE PHILADELPHIA ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY

RALPH LINTON, *Editor*
F. H. H. ROBERTS, JR., MELVILLE JACOBS,
AND HARRY L. SHAPIRO, *Associate Editors*

VOLUME 46

MENASHA, WISCONSIN, U. S. A.

PUBLISHED BY

THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

1944

[Title page]

5: Beals & Carrasco E-5 (1940-1941) 1944
NU34 Tarasco NU34
Sierra Tarascans

GAMES OF THE MOUNTAIN TARASCANS[1]

By RALPH L. BEALS *and* PEDRO CARRASCO[2]

121
171

ONE of the major changes in the field of Americanist studies in recent years has been the recognition of an increasing number of parallels between the simpler cultures of South America and those of North America. In a recent article in this journal, Dr. Robert H. Lowie reviewed some of the evidence and summarized the significance of the problems for American culture history.[3] One difficulty in interpreting the parallels now on record has been the absence of intervening cases between northern South America and the United States border. A decade ago the senior author of this paper pointed out evidence of parallels with South America to be found in northern Mexico and ventured to suggest that they represented the peripheral survivals of a culture once found in the Central and South Mexican and Central American areas which had been supplanted by the development of the high cultures.[4] Such a view would be greatly strengthened if survivals of such traits could be found in the intervening region of Middle America.

171
526

One striking parallel between North and South America is the occurrence of games similar to hockey in the Gran Chaco and among the Araucanians.[5] Despite the presence of elaborate ball games of different types in the intervening regions, hockey is strikingly absent. The major importance of the present paper is the recording of a hockey game still existing among the Tarascans in a region of high Middle American culture. As the modern Tarascans are notably deficient in games, associated types are also described, including a form of *quince* or patolli and two European games.

The presence of European games might suggest a post-Conquest introduction of hockey. Variants of the European games, however, are widespread in

---

[1] This paper is a contribution of the Program for Anthropological Investigations among the Tarascans, a cooperative program of the University of California and cooperating Mexican institutions. See AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST, 42, 1940, pp. 708–711.

[2] The data for this paper were collected by Sr. Carrasco in 1940–1941 while working as a student assistant from the Instituto Politécnico Nacional under the direction of the senior author. The senior author's part in this paper consists of field direction, translation and editing, and the writing of the introductory paragraphs. With one exception the games described are all from Angáhuan, a large village in the *municipio* of San Juan Parangarukutíri, about 25 miles west of Uruapan, Michoacán. The village is notably conservative in outlook and customs and the games described are not known in most Tarascan villages.

[114]
[131]

[3] Robert H. Lowie, *American Culture History* (AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST, 42, 1940), pp. 409–428.

[4] Ralph L. Beals. *Comparative Ethnology of Northern Mexico Before 1760* (Ibero-Americana 2, 1932), pp. 151–152.

[5] Erland Nordenskiöld, *Comparative Ethnographic Studies* 9, p. 8; Alfred Métraux, *El Hockey, Deporte de los Indios Chaqueños y de los Araucanos* (La Prensa, Buenos Aires, July 14, 1940, Section 3).

5: Beals & Carrasco E-5 (1940-1941) 1944
NU34 Tàrasco NU34
Sierra Tarascans

Mexico, while hockey hitherto has not been reported. Neither is there evidence that hockey type games were ever played by the Spanish. Angáhuan, the only village for which the game is reported, is one of the most isolated and conservative Tarascan villages. The games follow:

Uásukuni.[6] The game is played by two opposing sides of equal numbers. Any number may play. Each player has a stick, *uásukarákua*, in either of the two forms shown in figure 1. Mango wood is preferred. The ball, *tarándukua*, is often made of rags, but one made by winding cord about a center formed of a white substance secreted by the green worms of the madrone tree is preferred. The latter type of ball is called *tarándukua šanári.*

The game is always played around a block of the town. The starting point is a street intersection. The two teams line up as shown in figure 2. A representative of each team stands in the center of the intersection. One throws the ball in the air and each player then tries to knock it toward his own team. The winning team must take the ball around the block back to the starting street intersection.

The teams are sometimes representatives of different blocks in the town. The block chief, an official appointed annually by the mayor for each block in the town, names the men who will play. Men so named may not refuse to play. The most important occasion on which the game is played is the day following the feast of Conception, December 8. This day is called *sirá*ŋ*gua.* An official called the *kiéɲi*, who cares for the hospital (formerly a hospital in fact but now the residence of the *kiéɲi*; and the repository of ceremonial equipment) and runs errands for the heads of the ceremonial heirarchy in the church, makes an especially big ball of rags for the game. Two very large teams play with this ball, playing around each block of the town successively.[7]

Akúɛperani. Two men play with the same stick and ball used in *uásukuni.* The players start in the middle of a street and each attempts to knock the ball to an established goal.

Atásukuni. This game is played at Cherán, a large town 20 miles northeast of Urapan. Any number of players compete in two teams of equal size. Each player has a stick, *atásukua*, curved at one end and from a meter to a meter and a half in length. The ball, *apásikua*, is made of rags wrapped with cord. The players line up opposite one another according to the numbers engaged (fig. 3). The contest begins in the middle of a block and each side attempts to take the ball to the opponents' end of the block. A representative of each team first tosses a coin or pot sherd at a line. The man whose piece is nearest the line

[6] The recording of native terms is in the official alphabet now being used by the Departamento Autónomo de Asuntos Indígenas.

[7] The resemblance to the winter hockey games of the Southwest is very suggestive. Silvia Rendón writes that the game is played daily from December 9 to Carnival and that each block and every man competes during this period.

5: Beals & Carrasco E-5 (1940-1941) 1944
NU34 Tarasco NU34
Sierra Tarascans

526

FIG. 1

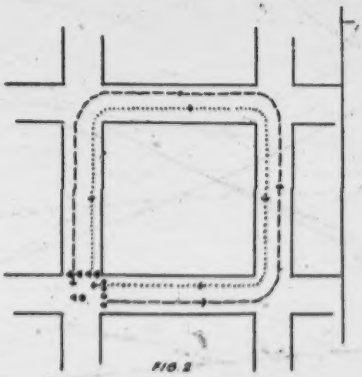

FIG. 2

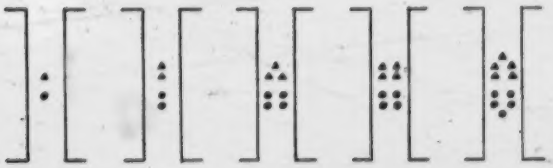

FIG. 3

[524]

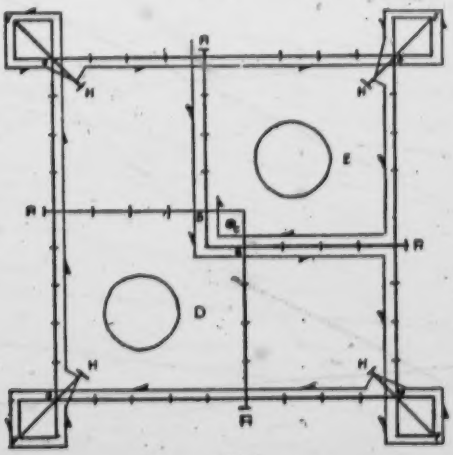

FIG. 4

Figure 1. Sticks used in *udsuhuni*.
Figure 2. Arrangement of course around a town block of *udsuhuni*. Players are shown at the starting position.
Figure 3. Various arrangements of players for *udsuhuni*.
Figure 4. The board used for *holcsidhus* or quince. The lighter line with arrows indicates the course followed by the pieces of one player. The letters are referred to in the text.

5: Beals & Carrasco E-5 (1940-1941) 1944
NU34 Tarasco NU34
Sierra Tarascans

puts the ball in play, knocking the ball toward his opponents. If possible, he lifts the ball in the air as it is thus more difficult to stop. If the ball passes the end of the block, the last man of the team nearest that goal must go after it, followed by the other players of his team who are supposed to maintain a constant distance from him. Should all the players of a team have to pass the line at the mouth of a street in order to keep the proper distance, the game is won by the opposing team.

The game may also be played with two balls which are put in play one after another.

The game is played only by boys and unmarried young men in the dry season during the winter. It is said that the reason for this is that the streets are too wet in the rainy season. The game may be played in the fields; in this case lines are drawn to represent the street. The game has almost disappeared and few young persons even know it.

In Charápan the Angáhuan type of game is known. In Chilchota, a former Tarascan town now "mestizoized" and where Tarascan is no longer spoken, a similar game is played during the rainy season at a place called La Mesa where there is turf.

Professor José Corona Nuñez has also described a similar game in the former Tarascan town of Cuitzeo on the lake of the same name.[8] The ball is a piece of burning maguey root, 7 to 10 centimeters in diameter, which burns slowly but stubbornly. The game is played at night and the ball gives off showers of sparks when struck. The opposing teams represent different barrios.

Professor Corona states that several codices show gods playing ball with a sort of stick or racket. He also mentions rock paintings near Queréndaro, Michoacán, showing two ball players with sticks or rackets. Ball players with clubs, playing in an "I"-shaped court, are also shown in a mural recently discovered at Teotihuacan.

Kolíṗs atárakua.[9] This game is a version of *quince* or patolli. A course or track is drawn on the ground or on a board (fig. 4). Two players compete, each with four pieces called *moskákua*. The players start at two opposing points (A in fig. 4) called *apórun*. The course followed by one player is indicated in the figure. Each piece is advanced in accordance with the score made by throwing four stick dice. The players take turns throwing the dice and moving the pieces. A player may apply the score made in one throw to only one piece.

If a piece comes to rest on the points marked B, it is said to be burned and must be started again at A, but until it is put in play again it must rest at point C, *kurínḳua* or bonfire. While on the interior part of the course the pieces of the two players will never stop on the same spot, but on the outer part of the

[8] *El Nacional* (September 6, 1942, México, D.F., first section), p. 3.

[9] In Angáhuan the *ra* is often omitted, giving the form *atákua*. The "l" sound only occurs in Tarascan in borrowed words; probably *kolíṗs* is in this category, but its origin is not identified.

5: Beals & Carrasco E-5 (1940-1941) 1944
NU34 Tarasco NU34
Sierra Tarascans

524

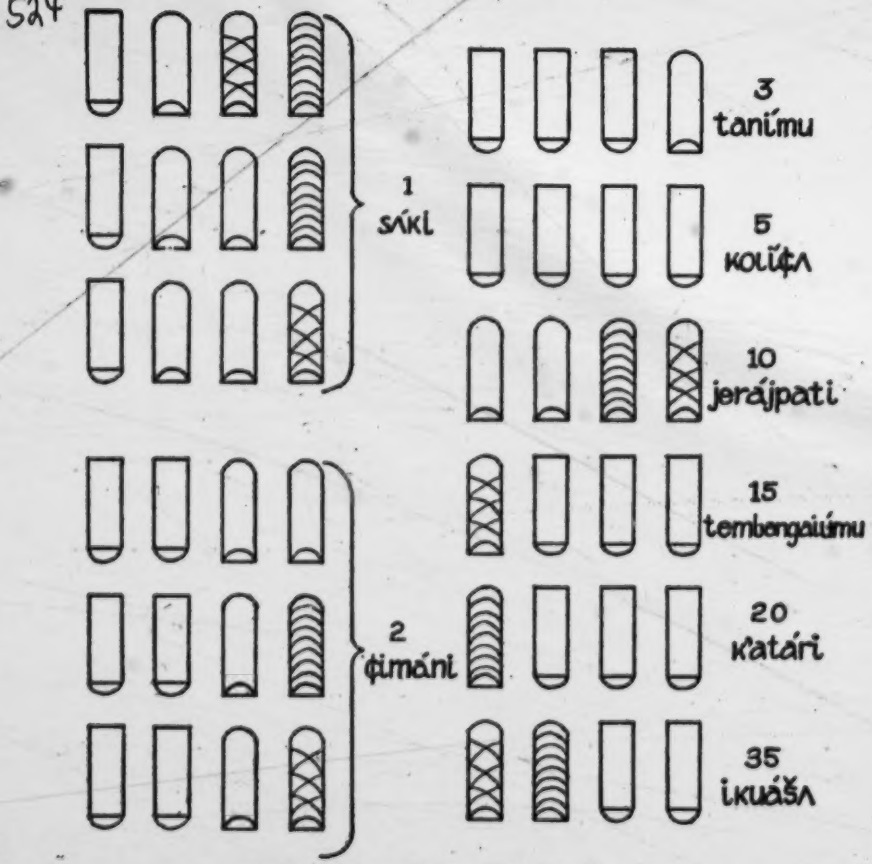

Figure 5. Scoring methods used for *kolcutáhua* or quince.

route this may happen. In this case the second arrival "kills" the first, which then must begin again at A. Until put in play again a "killed" piece must stay in circles D or E according to the player to whom it belongs.

Points F are called *anájʧikun* or summit. Once a piece makes the circuit of a loop at the corner of the board, it does not touch point G a second time, but goes instead to point H, *unandándani*. In this way there is no possibility of confusion as to whether a piece is entering or leaving the loop.

To complete the course each piece enters the interior track a second time. If the piece safely reaches any spot past point B it is regarded as having finished the circuit. The player who first gets all four of his pieces past B wins the game.

5: Beals & Carrasco E-5 (1940-1941) 1944
NU34 Tarasco NU34
Sierra Tarascans

524

The dice are called *kolíṗatárakua*. They are half round on one side, flat on the other and are about a palm breadth in length. Usually two sticks are split in half to make the four dice. The round side of one die is painted with parallel lines, while a second is painted with crossed lines. Figure 5 shows the markings and methods of scoring.

The game is played especially during the rainy season. On the eve of the feast of Assumption, August 15, it is played in the house of the caretakers of the saint or *cargueros*. On the day of the fifteenth it is played in the plaza. On this occasion money bets are often made.

Móskukua (*pieces*). This game is played by two players, each with twelve pieces which are placed on the board as shown in figure 6. The pieces may be

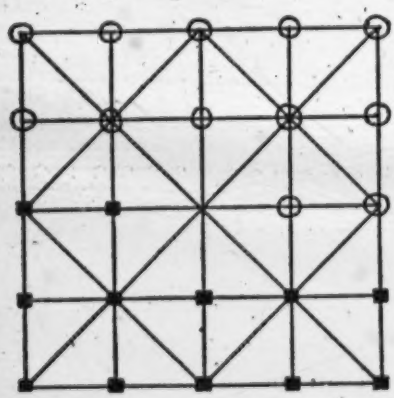

Figure 6. Starting arrangement of pieces for *móskukua*.

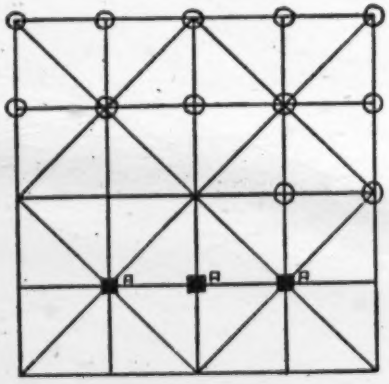

Figure 7. Starting arrangement of pieces for *kuato*.

advanced one space at a time unless there is an opponent's piece on the same line with a vacant space behind. In this case the piece jumps two spaces and "eats" the opponent's piece, putting it out of play. The player whose pieces are all eaten loses the game.

This game is also played during the rainy season and especially on the fourteenth and fifteenth of August, the feast of Assumption.

Kuato. This is the well known Mexican game of Coyote and Hens. It is played on the same board as *móskukua*. Twelve hens and one coyote are placed on the board as shown in figure 7. The coyote may be placed at any of the three spots marked A. The hens seek to encircle the coyote so the piece may not be moved. The coyote, on the other hand, seeks to eat all the hens, jumping over a piece and eating it whenever there is a vacant space behind a hen. There are no special times for playing this game.

5: Beals & Carrasco E-5 (1940-1941) 1944
NU34 Tarasco NU34
Sierra Tarascans

524
177

When others of the more isolated and conservative Tarascan towns are studied, probably more games will come to light. In the more progressive towns, games seem to be almost totally lacking, except such Mexican innovations as card games. For example, at Cherán, which was the subject of intensive study, the only game encountered was *atáɹukuni* if one except the various European games of modern character. Even *atáɹukuni* is now rarely played and few of the young people known it.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

ESCUELA NACIONAL DE ANTROPOLOGÍA
MEXICO